

Reaching Lost People

*Helping Friends
Find a Friendship with Jesus*

Richard & Kate Colbrook



Salt & Light Ministries

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Introduction

Dream

All men dream: but not equally. Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds wake in the day to find that it was vanity: but the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they may act their dreams with open eyes, to make it possible.

T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph*

At the start of this short book about helping our friends to begin their own friendship with Jesus, we'd like to invite you to dare to dream with your eyes wide open. Please don't read it as a textbook. It's not intended to be and we wouldn't want to presume that we could write such a book. Instead, as you read it, why not dare to dream? Dare to dream of your friends and family starting that friendship with Jesus; dream of watching them disappear under the water at their baptism (or, even better, of baptizing them yourself); dream of lives being changed by the love and power of God; dream of hope breaking into seemingly hopeless situations; dream of relationships being restored and, perhaps above all, dream of eternal destinies being transformed.

We like to dream those sorts of dreams. Over the last few years we've dreamed as we've walked through life with other people and had the privilege of walking with

them on their (and our own) journey of discovery about a friendship with Jesus that transforms lives now and forever.

This book is about how we can walk with friends in that sort of way. We walk with them, and we talk. We have the privilege of talking with them about Jesus, enabling them to hear of a saviour beyond their wildest dreams. We can also have the even greater privilege of seeing lives transformed as they call on the name of the Lord and are saved. In Romans 10:13-15 Paul puts it clearly:

'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'

Our friends need more than our friendship; they need to hear about, and begin a friendship with, Jesus Christ.

Chapter 1

Love

Where it all Starts

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son” (John 3:16). This is where you have to start when talking about reaching people with the fantastic news about Jesus Christ – the motivation behind it all. God so loved the world. He so loves people. The motivation God has in reaching out to people and rescuing them is fuelled by love and compassion.

Paul caught something of God’s passionate heart for people when he wrote,

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.

(1 Corinthians 9:19-22).

“*By all possible means*” – whatever it takes! That was Paul’s heart.

The man was obsessed or, perhaps more accurately, possessed, with a love and compassion-fuelled determination for the salvation of people that he had caught from God.

People were, and still are, the number-one focus for God’s love and compassion. Look at the life of Jesus in the gospels. People were his number-one thing. The gospels are full of stories, not of faceless crowds but of individuals whose lives were transformed. Just think of Peter, or the Samaritan woman at the well, or Jairus and his daughter or, one of our personal favourites, Zacchaeus the tax collector.

In Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10) we find a man rejected by everyone as a greedy scumbag in league with the Roman occupying forces as he ripped people off. He’d been written off by the religious people as the lowest of the low, down at the bottom of the pile along with prostitutes. According to them he was a sinner beyond redemption; no self-respecting Jew would talk to him, let alone eat at his house. Then along came Jesus, calling Zacchaeus by name and inviting himself to eat at his home. That act alone cries out acceptance, compassion, and love. We don’t know all the content of the conversation over that meal table; but we do know the remarkable response in repentance of the tax collector and the wonderful words of Jesus which confirmed that this man was now part of God’s family, and that Jesus had come “*to seek and to save what was lost*”.

Jesus came, in his own words, to seek and to save what was lost. He came to seek out and save lost people. He

came to save them from a life empty of a relationship with God, an eternity of judgment and desperate separation. We need to be clear: heaven really is absolute heaven and hell really is absolute hell. The hope and future certainty Christians enjoy of the return of Jesus and a new heaven and new earth with no more death or mourning or crying or pain is in marked contrast to the pain and anguish of lostness facing those who do not know Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. In an age of constant pressure to be inclusive (often for very good reason), we cannot move away from the exclusive claim of Jesus that no one comes to the Father except through him. If we water down that truth, then we risk diluting or even losing the God-given motivation that 'by all possible means we might save some'.

Lost

Yet, for us, the motivation to reach out to people is less about the fire and brimstone of hell (though we would never want to lose sight of the importance of a person's eternal destiny) and much more about the love and compassion of Jesus Christ for people made in God's image yet tragically separated from him. Jesus captures this brilliantly with three parables in Luke 15. *The lost sheep* is away from the safety of the flock and the protection of the shepherd, alone and in danger. *The lost coin* cannot be spent until found, without value until it is back where it belongs. *The lost son* is far away from home and a father who loves him, up to his neck in a mess of his own making, with nowhere to turn except back to the father he had rejected. These stories can become very familiar and lose some of the impact and pain of lostness,

but it doesn't take long if you share some of life with lost people to feel some of that pain, and the emptiness and hopelessness that it brings.

Wonderfully though, these stories are not just about being lost, but also about being found! The stories of the lost sheep and the lost coin both underline intentional searching. The stories have an awareness of something being lost and a pressing need to find it again. The shepherd and the woman won't rest until what was lost is found; and we have a saviour who will not rest in his seeking after lost people. As for the lost son, the emphasis is somewhat different here. Clearly the father does not go looking or searching for him. All we know is that the father 'saw him'. The point of this third reinforcing parable is probably the father's absolute readiness to receive his wayward son, no matter how bad or lost he has been. It is also worth noting that Luke (or maybe Jesus himself) put these three parables together. That isn't an accident! When things come in 3s in the Bible, it is generally expressing certainty or assuredness (like in the proverb, 'a three-fold cord is not easily broken'). Maybe this is Luke's (or Jesus') way of showing the absolute necessity of going searching for what is lost and the absolute certainty of the Father's readiness to receive the lost, no matter what they have been doing or where they have been.

The Father's readiness to receive lost people is seriously good news! Jesus came proclaiming this good news: that God wants to get involved in our lives and transform them. Jesus came proclaiming the good news that God's kingdom is close. His kingdom is about God ruling in human hearts. It's about that rule opening up

the possibility of people living life in a full way. It is hugely optimistic. The kingdom comes into a person's life as they start a relationship with the king. For us, therefore, as we help our friends to understand this, we become introduction agents, helping people to take steps towards that point when they first meet the king. How can we do this? It starts by simply being friends!

Questions:

1. What do you feel about Jesus' and Paul's focus on reaching the lost 'whatever it takes'? Why not pray and ask Jesus for some of his heart and determination?
2. The parables of the lost sheep and coin are about intentional searching. We'll talk more about this later but for now think about how intentional you are in reaching out to people.
3. The gospel of the kingdom is described as being hugely optimistic. How would you describe how you feel about the gospel?

Chapter 2

Normal

Before we talk about being friends, we would like to dispel a common myth. It goes something like this: 'I'm not going to look to talk to my friends about Jesus because I want a genuine friendship without any agenda.' Maybe this myth is a response to some rather insensitive and ineffective personal evangelism when a Christian goes into 'Worzel Gummidge' evangelism mode. Worzel Gummidge is a children's fictional scarecrow who has a number of different heads that are interchangeable to suit different occasions or particular needs. We can do that when talking to someone about Jesus. We suddenly change heads and go into 'evangelistic confrontation' mode. The conversation becomes more about winning an argument (which was probably unnecessary to have in the first place) rather than winning our friend.

In his book *Just Walk across the Room*, Bill Hybels calls these sort of people 'erupters'. Once they sniff the opportunity to 'evangelize', they stop listening and are just waiting for the chance to ram super-spiritual Bible verses down the other person's throat. Perhaps erupters do this because they are just not used to talking about spiritual things in a relaxed and natural way. Maybe they genuinely think that this is how you are supposed to 'do evangelism'.

Most of us wouldn't want this sort of interaction with our friends for genuine fear of losing that friendship. So we adopt the other unhelpful mode of operation described by Hybels; we become 'avoiders' and keep all spiritual conversations bottled-up. Surely though, if we are to be genuine friends, then that must mean we care about whether our friends have a relationship with God or not, because it has totally transformed us for the better and we would surely want the same for them. What's more, when a friend is facing uncertainty or possibly even death, don't we want them (and us) to know for sure that their eternity is one full of life, love, and hope? For us, the right response to the erupter mode of evangelism isn't to avoid, but rather to be a natural and *normal* friend for whom spiritual conversations can be had in just the same way as chats about football, what's on offer at the supermarket, our job, the latest TV show, or our holiday.

Being friendly!

So here are a few simple tips on being friendly:

1. Be warm, relaxed, normal, and listen

Let your human warmth come through in conversations without being intense or sickly sweet. Enjoy it as you chat to people and laugh with them. Just talk about what you have in common. If you are nervous about talking to people or initiating conversations, ask God to help you break through this. If you're a bit of a 'talker', then be aware of hogging the conversation; make extra effort to let the other person talk.

2. *It's relationship not religion we're talking about*
– *it's normal!*

This is really important so let us explain what we mean. Authentic Christianity is more about relationship than religion. Religion is like a ladder supposedly reaching up to heaven. Religion gives you a set of rules, a long list of *dos* and an even longer list of *don'ts*. Each time you keep one of the rules, you climb another rung up the ladder towards heaven. But break a rule and you drop at least one rung (if not more) back down! You spend your life trying to keep the rules and living in the fear and uncertainty of never knowing if you've done enough to really get into God's good books. Religion ultimately doesn't work. Religious people (like the Pharisees in the gospels) are judgmental and treat unrepentant sinners with condemnation (just look at the story of the woman caught in adultery). They look down from their higher position on the ladder at others who are struggling.

Fortunately, Jesus did not come into the world to condemn sinners or to start a new religion. Religious Christianity (and it does exist, sadly) creates a 'them and us' mentality towards lost people. Contrast this with the wonderful honesty of authentic Christianity that recognizes that the ladder up to heaven (the distance between a holy God and us, if you like) is infinitely long and none of us will ever make it all the way to the top. So, God in Jesus Christ comes down the ladder, makes his home amongst us and, by dying on the cross in place of us, makes it possible for us to enter into God's family without our futile attempts to earn it by religious

performance. That's the message of grace and the offer of relationship of authentic Christianity.

To continue the analogy of the ladder, God knows we'll never make it up the ladder so he came down and installed an elevator. The elevator takes us straight up to start a friendship with God once we accept what God has done for us through Jesus dying on the cross. Our personal experience as we talk to people is that few, if any, are interested in religion. They rightly recognize it as the domain of hypocrites. But the moment you start talking about having a real friendship with God and the hope and purpose that brings... Well, that's a different matter!

3. *Don't avoid spiritual conversations, but don't be intense either*

We've already covered this in talking about erupters and avoiders, but it's worth saying again. We really are talking about our friendship with God, not religion. Friendship is perfectly normal and, increasingly in a postmodern world, so is the recognition of the reality of the spiritual dimension. So, just be normal. Don't be too intense; but equally the intensity or genuineness of your personal convictions are important. People need to know that what you're talking about is real. They need to see it in your eyes. So, don't be apologetic about a fantastic saviour or about how great it is to have a relationship with him.

4. *Don't stuff your life full of believers*

This is a common danger for us as Christians. The fellowship, family, and friendship we enjoy in the

church, coupled with a packed diary, can mean we spend all our time with Christians – and this is especially true for those saved for more than five years and ‘full-time’ church leaders. Bill Hybels in *Just Walk across the Room* puts it well: “To be effective you have to get near to people who are living far from God.” We need to be aware of what we do with our ‘third space’ time – the time we don't spend either at work or with our family. For us, we have found that spending time with those who are lost is incredibly rewarding and enjoyable. It’s fun, and the more you do it, the more you want to do it. We make sure there's room in the diary for people who are not yet Christians. You don't even have to keep looking to make your own non-Christian friends from scratch; get to know the families and friends of those who have recently become Christians as well. Jesus had a pretty packed schedule, but he still had time to notice the people who came across his path, follow the nudges of the Holy Spirit, and spend time with them. Zacchaeus is a perfect example of this.

5. *Focus on good news and mercy*

We would encourage you to read the gospels again and to try thinking of those familiar stories from a slightly different angle. Think about how Jesus saw the people he interacted with and how those people felt as a result of meeting him. Jesus saw people more as sad than bad. He felt love and compassion for them and reached out to them with mercy. As for the people, they followed Jesus and wanted to be around him. Jesus is good news for people. We need to help our friends see Jesus in a true

light, seeking to ensure we make the gospel attractive in our lives and in our words.

6. *Get to know people and their stories*

As you begin to really get to know people, you will start to feel some of Jesus' compassion and mercy for them. That makes you able to genuinely communicate his love and the hope he offers, but it's not without pain. We'll talk more about this in chapter 4.

Charles Spurgeon, the great 19th Century church leader and evangelist in London, put it like this in his book *The Soul Winner*: "You must have a real desire for the good of the people if you are to have much influence over them. Sit down with people and make yourself at home with them."

Commissioned by the King

We've already talked about one unhelpful myth, but it's worth addressing another – though it's perhaps less of a myth and more of an attitude. In the past, evangelism has been presented as something we 'do'. This encourages the Worzel Gummidge evangelism mode we've already talked about. You put on your evangelism head, get intense, and have an argument. It's much better to think of reaching lost people as less about 'what we do' and much more about 'who we are'. It's not about methods or techniques but about sharing life together. It's about being friends and talking about the spiritual side of life in a normal way.

As well as the tendency to be a Worzel Gummidge evangelist, thinking of evangelism as something we 'do' creates another problem: we feel that we *ought* to do it.

Evangelism then becomes a religious duty rather than a joy. We find ourselves handling scriptures like the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 as though God is twisting our arms behind our backs, forcing us to do something we would really rather not do. But this completely misses God's heart for us and for others.

Let's look at the Great Commission from a slightly different angle. Jesus said:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

We need to understand firstly what a commission is. It's so much more than a command to do something. Kate used to be a tax inspector (a real conversation stopper at parties!). When she qualified, she received her commission. It was an impressive leather-bound folder with the royal crest on the front, saying she had been commissioned by the Queen to collect taxes and had authority to call on the assistance of the police and the armed forces to carry out this duty. Rather cool, don't you think! Kate never had to call for such assistance; but the point is, she was commissioned or empowered to do her job. That's why, in the Great Commission, Jesus started by telling his disciples (and us) that he's got all the authority and power. He's the King so he can delegate that authority; he can empower us. And that's what he does. He even underlines the fact by telling us

that he'll be with us. Not only have we been empowered by the King, but he is right alongside! Fantastic!

Rather than seeing the Great Commission as some sort of command we ought to obey, therefore, we might be better seeing it as a commission we have the privilege of carrying – a commission integral to Jesus' vision for people. He wants us to see that vision, be enthralled by it and dream it with him. Imagine the lives changed, the families healed, the communities turned around, the eternal destinies transformed. That then changes the motivation for reaching out. I no longer do it because I 'ought' to but because I'm 'caught' to do it. I'm caught by this vision. I'm caught by Jesus' heart for me and for others. I'm caught by the thought of seeing Jesus involved in lives and transforming them. I'm caught by eternity. Please, please don't feel you *have to do* evangelism. Be free from that! Rather, catch the heart of Jesus. It's an infectious heart. Let him empower you with his love and compassion, the driving force behind the Great Commission. That's the vision for reaching lost people.

A Story

A book about people wouldn't be complete without some stories. So here's our first.

Bill's wife Janet became a Christian some years ago through a friendship with their neighbours. She enjoyed a real and lasting change in her life with a lifting of depression associated with long-term illness. Bill was clear that God had changed his wife's life for the better and was grateful. Life went on for both of them. Bill knew a number of people in Janet's church. He appreciated

their friendship and support for his wife. In fact, he became an advocate for the church, supporting its reputation in discussions at work. We were friends with Bill and Janet and did the sort of things friends do: we cared for each other. There were opportunities to drive Janet to visit Bill in hospital once and we received a fantastic family car from them at a knockdown price.

Just before a holiday abroad Janet was admitted to hospital with suspected angina. The church was praying and expecting her to be home soon when events took a surprising turn. Bill called to say that Janet had a collapsed artery and was facing an emergency triple bypass operation the next morning. Bill and Rich cried together on the phone and Rich prayed. When Bill phoned the following day, his first words were, “It worked!” He meant the prayer! The news was good and got even better. The doctors had warned of damage to the heart muscles but were amazed to report none at all. What’s more, they told Bill and Janet that had she flown away on holiday she would have most likely died of a heart attack on the flight. Bill was clear – God had saved his wife’s life.

Bill was in the position that lots of people find themselves in. He believed in God, had close family and friends who were Christians, had tasted God’s goodness and love, but had yet to be saved. As his friends, we didn’t want him to stay in this ‘no man’s land’ so invited him along to a DVD-based course we were hosting called *Journeys* (a testimony-based introduction to Christianity). It’s important to help friends along in their journey of discovery about who Jesus is (and we’ll talk more about this in chapter 5). We talked one week about how we had

become Christians and he asked us to write out the prayer that we had prayed inviting God into our lives. We prayed that week for Bill and received a fantastic phone call from Janet telling us that she had a new husband! We're still close friends and do what friends do. Rich was recently ill after an operation and Bill told him that he should consider him and his car at his disposal. Rich needed a lift back home and Bill was true to his word.

As we finish this chapter, there is something striking about Jesus' feelings towards people as you read the gospels. Again and again we are told that he had compassion for them. Compassion is more than a feeling; it's a motivational force. It's a strong emotion that always pushes Jesus to get involved. Compassion makes him want to touch someone's life. Compassion for people, rather than condemnation, is a reflection of the heart of God.

Jesus still feels compassion. He wants to get involved, to transform, to bring hope, and he wants to do it through you and me. We'll think some more about this in chapter 4; but before we do that, we have to ask a question. "So what gets in the way of this happening?"

Questions:

1. What do you think to the 'Worzel Gummidge mode of evangelism'? Do you see something of that in yourself? What pressurises you not to be 'normal' in sharing your faith?
2. Which tips on being friendly spoke to you the most and why?
3. How do you feel about the privilege of being commissioned by the King?

Chapter 3

Blocks

So what gets in the way of us helping our friends to begin a relationship with Jesus? There can be lots of things; but three ‘biggies’ (which are interlinked) are the past, fear, and unbelief.

Getting Past the Past

The Tay Rail Bridge spans the beautiful Tay Estuary just south of Dundee, Scotland. It is an impressive two and a quarter miles long, shortening the journey around the estuary considerably. We’ve travelled over it many times to visit family further north. Each crossing is not without its nervousness, though. You can’t help but notice that alongside the present bridge lie the stumps of the old one, clearly visible, even at high tide. It was during a force 10 gale on the stormy night of 28th December 1879 that the previous bridge collapsed, plunging 75 people into the icy waters below, killing all. The event remains one of the worst structural engineering disasters of the British Isles.

We all have our own ‘Tay Bridges’ – stumps of projects, situations or, indeed, people, where a dream collapsed. Perhaps someone fell away, or you were criticized, or you made mistakes. When it collapsed, it didn’t just disappear however. The enemy of our souls

loves there to be just enough of it still visible for it to be a constant reminder of why the gospel doesn't work, why we are not effective at evangelism, or why we have failed and shouldn't continue our efforts. Our focus becomes the stumps of the old rather than pressing on to reach the other side of the water.

The enemy loves to taunt. Goliath flattened the Israelites with his taunts; those constant accusations of weakness which went on for forty days. It paralysed them and no more progress was made. If we are to move forward in reaching lost people (and do this we must), then we must deal with the stumps from the past that taunt us and impede our progress. David had the right spirit when he declared, "*Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?*" (1 Samuel 17:26). Ultimately Goliath may have looked big and made a lot of noise, but in the end his taunts were overcome by 'the God of the armies of Israel' whom he defied. We should seek to develop a similarly robust attitude to the disappointments that come our way in the fight to see people won for Christ.

The parable of the sower (Matthew 13:3-23; Mark 4:3-20; Luke 8:5-15) is a key to understanding that not everything goes according to plan. Not all seed falls on good soil. Kate had an example of this during the writing of this chapter. While out shopping she bumped into a lady who, in the words of this parable, had "*received the message of the gospel with joy*". For a while she blossomed and was a source of encouragement to many in the church as we saw God begin to change her life. Sadly, though, there came a time of trial for which she blamed God. In great bitterness she walked away, making

sure all who would listen knew in detail how God had let her down. When Kate saw her, she would not make eye contact and totally blanked her. Though not the first time this had happened, it was nevertheless upsetting. However, it's an easy jump from feeling upset and natural concern for the person to allowing the enemy to use the situation to dilute faith in the gospel and cause discouragement to set in. We need to be on our guard against this.

Fear

Have you ever had a conversation with another Christian which goes something like this? You have a great idea for reaching out with the gospel to some friends – and immediately the other person points out why the idea is doomed to failure. It happens all too often, even in church leadership team meetings. The reason why the idea won't work can sound so wise at the time. Often, though, it is nothing more than fear dressed up as wisdom.

In truth, pushing out into something new, especially reaching out, can be intimidating, and there will always seem to be a good reason why we shouldn't do it. We're all susceptible to this. A few years ago Rich was procrastinating about running an evangelistic *Journeys* course with some guys. In fact, he'd been procrastinating for a year! "I'm not sure it's quite the right time," he said. Kate responded, "You know, you said that last year. Will you say the same thing again next year?" It was the kick he needed. The *Journeys* course ran, people became Christians, another *Journeys* course was the knock-on

effect, and more were saved. To date, fifteen people have become Christians as a direct result of those courses.

Often we are fearful of making mistakes. The truth is, some outreach ideas are crazy and are highly unlikely to work; but there are plenty of ideas that may just work – and we don't know unless we try. Returning to the parable of the sower, it's worth noting that seed is scattered liberally. Sow lots because you just don't know which seed will hit good soil. People surprise you. So we need a far more laid-back attitude than is often the case in church outreach. We need to encourage a culture of 'let's have a go!' Give it your best shot. If the idea works, great. If it doesn't, let's not beat ourselves up or spend months analysing in minute detail why it didn't work. Instead, let's just try something else.

We had an example of the need to 'keep having a go until something works' with a Pensioners' Club we run in Blackbird Leys. The club is led by a wonderful couple with their friend. It started after the husband became a Christian and joined the church. Each Wednesday around forty older people meet for afternoon tea, card games, friendship, and the all important game of bingo. The club organizes raffles, trips to the seaside, and a Christmas lunch. It's fantastic. A number of the club members had expressed an interest in finding out more about this 'relationship with God thing' but nothing ever seemed to materialize. We tried all sorts of things over three years and nothing worked. The coffee morning with home-baked muffins had a grand total of zero guests turning up!

We got so desperate that we started to fast and pray for breakthrough. Suddenly an opportunity emerged out

of nowhere. While at the club the following week, one of the members suggested a lunch before the club. Rich came away having arranged a fish and chip lunch alongside a DVD of amazing true-life stories. (We're still not quite sure how God did this!) A couple of Wednesdays later we launched a lunch-time *Journeys* course over five weeks. This time twenty of our friends from the club came along and then stayed on afterwards for the regular club meeting. To date, sixteen of them have discovered for themselves what we mean about this 'relationship with God thing'.

Whilst talking about the need to sow liberally, it's worth mentioning another aspect of sowing. Laurence Singlehurst in his book *Sowing, Reaping, Keeping* talks about the first stage of sowing – 'Sowing 1', whose aim is to simply communicate that "God is good and Christians are OK". We can do this in lots of different ways, including community-based church-run projects like youth clubs, debt counselling, and mums and tots groups. Many churches are increasingly taking seriously their role to bless their communities. Such activities are run for the benefit of people and communities and have inherent value as a result. But, to say this is their only role completely misses the door-opening opportunity such activities provide for the gospel. Their value can cease to be simply temporal and, as the gospel bears fruit in lives, become eternal.

The Big One

Let's turn our attention now to what is probably the biggest block of all – unbelief. Past disappointments can cause unbelief to take root and make us fearful of

reaching out. If we are not careful, we can become trapped in a vicious circle of unbelief and failure. We need the Holy Spirit to first illuminate the problem, then to help us deal with it.

The Amplified Bible translation of Genesis 3:1 reads:

*Now the serpent was more subtle and crafty than any living creature of the field which the Lord God had made. And he [Satan] said to the woman, can it **really** be that God has said, you shall not eat of every tree of the garden? [emphasis added]*

Can you hear the sneer of unbelief in Satan's "Oh, *really?*" This is the voice we're listening to every time we question whether the gospel actually works, whether someone's new-found faith is genuine, whether someone will actually say "yes" when we ask if they would like a friendship with God. The problem is, as the above passage demonstrates, the enemy is subtle, and so is his voice. Unbelief is insidious. It gets into us and we often don't notice. It's like a faint mist on a mountain. You don't really notice it as you climb, but it quietly gets thicker and thicker until, before you know it, it begins to seriously impede your visibility. The mist continues to worsen and can get so thick that you can no longer see where you are going. Now the mist is a potential killer – a false step in the fog could result in a fatal fall.

To understand the power of this insidious spiritual cancer, let's look at John's gospel. In John 20:30-31 we're told why the writer has written his gospel – that the miraculous signs recorded in it might cause belief to grow that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that by believing we might have life in his name. It's the Gospel

of Belief. John takes the first twelve chapters to describe some of Jesus' public ministry. During those chapters we see some of Jesus' disciples grow in belief about Jesus. We also see the Jewish religious leaders grow in unbelief. This divergence of belief and unbelief becomes increasingly stark. In chapter 11 the most amazing miracle is recounted – the raising of Lazarus from the dead. This awe-inspiring event, intended to produce a reaction of belief, has precisely the opposite effect on the unbelieving Jewish leaders. Incredibly, they now plan not only to kill Jesus, but Lazarus as well! That's what unbelief does. It kills. Unbelief in us kills the plans God has for us. It strangles the life out of our hopes of seeing loved ones come to Christ.

The fight for belief and faith – to remain clear about the power of the gospel – is just that: an ongoing fight for each of us. We'd like to tell you some of our own story to illustrate this. In 2000 Rich went to a conference in Cumbernauld, Scotland. He'd been working as an assistant pastor for 6 years and was desperate to see more people become Christians, both personally and through the outreach of the church. Over the previous 13 years, since becoming a Christian in 1987, he had led just two people to Christ. The first thing to impact him at the conference was the number of people from the hosting churches who had stories to tell of friends they had seen become Christians. It wasn't just one or two leaders or evangelists; it seemed to be everyone. Later that evening, alone in his room, Rich had an encounter with God.

“Do you believe the gospel?” he felt God asking him. “Yes,” he replied. “Do you believe the gospel?” The

question came again. This time Rich thought about his response. The truth was that he did believe the gospel for himself, but had no expectation that the gospel would work for people he knew who were not Christians. God had shone his spotlight on unbelief. Rich didn't get much sleep that night. He needed to pray and repent. The next day Jimmy Dowds, one of the hosting pastors, gave Rich a prophetic word, accurately describing what had happened a few hours earlier. Rich left Cumberland changed.

The best way to describe this change is that it was a change of expectation. Belief is about expectation. From expecting a "no" when sharing the gospel, he started to expect a "yes." The gospels came alive like never before and people Rich talked to began to want to know Jesus as their saviour. Kate had a similar encounter with God. Hers was in Bogota, Colombia and it had the same effect on her expectations. She too came home changed.

We would suggest that the fight for the right sort of expectations about the power of the gospel is one we all face. And it's an ongoing fight. Encounters won't win that fight once and for all. They certainly helped us, but it's a fight we face repeatedly. We need to fight continuously to keep our vision clear, to keep the end goal in mind, to keep dreaming. Prayer, fasting, and perseverance all play their part, and we'll talk about these in more detail in subsequent chapters.

A few months after the Cumberland encounter, God gave us a wonderful demonstration of the power of his gospel. We met Tim who was in his mid-thirties. He had arrived in Oxford one Thursday, having pulled out of a college course. As he stepped off the coach with a few

bags holding all his possessions, he said to himself, “Tim, you’ve trashed your life.” Fortunately for Tim, he had a Christian friend back at college who came to Oxford to see him and brought him along to our Sunday meeting. The following day Tim came round for coffee. His story was a sad one. He had tried every religion, occult practice, and drug we’d heard of (and some that we hadn’t!). He had a catalogue of other destructive habits and practices; the list just went on and on. He was addicted to a Class A drug, was a binge-drinking alcoholic, and suffered from debilitating daily anxiety attacks. Tim’s claim to fame was that, as a young person, he had appeared in his local newspaper as the youngest person ever to fail a breathalyser test after drinking a few beers and taking his mum’s car out for a spin (without a driving licence). For over an hour he listed the sins that had trashed his life. He mentioned that he had read the gospels in an old King James Bible, so Rich was able to talk about what Jesus is really like.

By the end of the conversation Rich was feeling totally out of his depth and unsure what to say. All he could think of asking was, “Well Tim, you’ve tried everything else. Have you ever thought of trying God?” Tim rocked back on his chair as though he’d been punched. “Wow”, he said, “That’s what I need. How do I do that?” God had clearly broken in and given him revelation; you could see it in his eyes. That morning Tim repented and gave his life to Jesus. We were so excited and surprised that we completely forgot to pray for freedom from the drug addiction, the alcohol problem, and the anxiety attacks! But Tim left with a smile on his face. That evening, Kate took a phone call. “Kate, Kate,” he said, “Am I going

mad? I feel all warm and tingly all over and it feels better than any drugs I've ever had. It feels like if it gets any better I'm going to explode. What's happening? Is it really meant to be this good?!" This story happened ten years ago. Tim remains a good friend. He is head-over-heels in love with the God who, in an instant while Tim was having coffee in our lounge, freed him from addiction to drugs and alcohol and healed his anxiety. Tim has not taken drugs or drunk alcohol for ten years. We know that freedom doesn't always come instantly; for many, it's more of a process. But God underlined for us the amazing power of his gospel as his love and power broke into Tim's life that morning.

Let's Have a Fight

The truth is that God has not made it difficult for people to be saved. Jesus' well-known words in Luke 10:2 that "*the harvest is plentiful*" are true! And Isaiah 33:5-6 says that God possesses "*...a rich storehouse of salvation.*" As with any aspect of truth, the enemy would love to see its power belittled; so we need to learn to fight against unbelief in an on-going way. Breakthrough in this area will not just land in our laps. We must fight for faith and belief in the glorious power of the gospel and keep on fighting! Here are six ways we have found helpful – six 'R's to help *retaliate* against unbelief:

1. Read the Gospels – see the master fisherman at work. As you read them, look at how Jesus handles people with love, compassion, and mercy.
2. Recognize unbelief for what it is and don't rationalize failure. People suffering from unbelief normally call themselves 'realists'. There's nothing wrong with being a realist in some ways but it's the 'realism' that always finds a reason for outreach not working that's a problem. Repent, fast, pray, and seek prayer if you need to. Look to 'catch' something from evangelists – ask them to pray for you.
3. Renew your thinking – ask God to change your thinking so you expect your lost friends to be saved.
4. Rehearse your own salvation story and rejoice in it.
5. Revel in the testimonies of others and rejoice with the angels when someone is saved.
6. Resurrect the dreams of people being saved and keep dreaming them and praying them into reality.

We'll finish this chapter with another quote from Charles Spurgeon's *The Soul Winner* about the importance of belief:

It is true that God does not always measure his mercy by our unbelief, for He has to think of other people as well as of us; but, looking at the matter in a commonsense way, it does seem that the most likely instrument to do the Lord's work is the man who expects that God will use him, and who goes forth to labour in the strength of that conviction. When success comes, he is not surprised, for he was looking for it.

Questions:

1. Which of the three blocks (the past, fear or unbelief) did you most identify with and why?
2. What do you feel you need to do in order to begin to get beyond this block?
3. Do you feel you could commit yourself to the six 'R's to retaliate against unbelief?

Chapter 4

Stories

As you read the gospels it is clear that Jesus didn't have a formula that he followed as he reached out to people. He engaged with them in the depths of their being. They were unique individuals and he treated them as such. He respected or, in cases like Zacchaeus, restored, their dignity. We should respect our friends as unique people made in God's image. We shouldn't try to have some sort of formula to 'get them saved'. Instead we should focus on sharing life with them. For each friend this will be different, though our focus remains the same – fullness of life is to be found in Jesus Christ.

Really Getting to Know People

Bill Hybels in his excellent book *Just Walk across the Room* says that we need to get to know people and their stories. He says, "Learn what life has been like for them. What they dream about. What is going well in their estimation and what needs work. And as you might guess, these discussions don't occur at arms length. You have to throw yourself into people's lives to earn the right to have these types of conversations." He's right. Jesus never had a formula – he simply shared life with people. We should do the same.

As you really start to get to know people and their stories and begin to share life, something happens: you start to feel compassion. As we said in chapter 2, compassion is a strong emotion; but it's more than just a feeling – it's a motivational force. Just look at Jesus in the gospels. Time and time again he feels compassion for a person or group of people. He doesn't just leave it at the level of experiencing some deep emotion; he does something. He prays, heals, reaches out, and saves; he does something. Once you're starting to get to know people and are feeling compassion for them (you are actually feeling some of the compassion God has for them), then be ready for God to open the door for you to get more involved – for you to be able to do something.

The Spice of Life

We'd like to tell you another story. Mike and Lesley Spicer kindly gave us permission to tell you about their son, Jake.

The first member of the Spicer family we met was Ryan, one of Jake's older brothers, in early 2006 when he started coming along to a youth group at our home. Ryan was experiencing difficulties at school and Rich was asked to mentor him. Soon we went to Ryan's home to talk with Lesley, his mum. That's when we met Jake. He had been fighting Ewing's Sarcoma (a bone cancer) for over two years. Ryan felt helpless as he watched his younger brother's fight, which was why he was finding it hard to cope at school. Rich and Ryan struck up a good, trusting friendship.

The youth group had been watching the *Journeys* DVDs and one evening Ryan took a piece of paper home

summarizing what they'd been watching. It talked about Christianity being more about relationship than religion, and about hope. Lesley read it and the next time she saw Rich, she said, "We could all do with a bit more hope, couldn't we?" We started to pray about how we could help Lesley and her family find a bit more hope. We decided to ask her if she'd like to host a *Journeys* course at her home. She did a fantastic job and the course blossomed into 'The Spice of Life' – our Thursday night group with people who became close friends. We watched *Journeys*, a follow-on series called *Life Stories*, and some movies. We talked lots, ate together, had fun, and went on a journey of discovery about hope and a friendship with God. We also shared desperately sad times together as news about Jake's cancer hit us all hard.

One evening we felt we should invite members of the group to become Christians. We had talked about karaoke the previous week so we did some of our own, to Stuart Townend's song *In Christ Alone*. We sang the song three times and then made a simple invitation. Six of the group, including Jake, were saved that night. Jake's testimony was this: "As we sang the song through the third time, I felt God say to me, 'Jake, the words you're singing are true.' So at the end I asked him into my life." The following week we sang the song again and three more of the group were saved, including Lesley. A few weeks later Ryan too was saved.

In January 2009 we celebrated one of the most moving baptism services we have ever witnessed. Jake, by then very ill, Lesley, Ryan, and other family members and friends proclaimed and celebrated the victory that Jesus

won for them. But 2009 was also an incredibly painful year. Jake's health deteriorated, though he never stopped fighting. He became known as the OX4 (our postcode) Soldier. He celebrated his fifteenth birthday in May and we bought him a gold cross and chain which he never took off. One day he said to us, "This cross is more than 'bling' (slang for lots of gold jewellery) to me. This is who I am." Each time we prayed with him, Jake's hand would hold the cross. Two days before Jake died, we prayed with him and, though almost unconscious, his left hand came up and clung tightly to the cross. He never let it go and died with the cross in his hand. The last thing we said to Jake before he died was, "We'll see you later". And we will.

Jake's faith in Jesus remained steadfast. The week before he died, he was praying with us for his yet-to-be-saved family and friends and God gave him prophetic pictures. He wasn't just an OX4 Soldier in his fight against cancer, but an OX4 Soldier in his faith as well. Five hundred people attended his funeral and heard his story about the God who had saved him. We sang 'In Christ Alone' as a declaration that there is a sure and certain hope beyond the grave. Jake has left a huge hole in many hearts and his death is incredibly painful; but this we know – because of his faith in Jesus, we will see him again.

It Hurts at Times

We told you Jake's story not just because it is an incredible story, but also to illustrate that sharing life with people hurts at times. You laugh together, and you also cry together. The people we know, first and

foremost, are our friends. We care about them, love them, and when they suffer it hurts us. That's the privilege of sharing life together. But, as you share life like this, you can also share the life that Jesus offers. As you really get to know people, you find you desperately want them to know the love and saving power of Jesus for themselves because you care about them. You can help them to understand and accept history's most significant event: the Son of God dying to provide forgiveness and life, and his resurrection as the declaration that our greatest enemy, death, has been defeated. You will also find that you increasingly understand the person. You understand what makes them tick, how they think, and what they'll feel. You can relate more closely.

As well as hurting emotionally, reaching out can cost in other ways – time, money, and hard work, to name but three. It costs; but these are people we're talking about, friends who have infinite worth.

Tips for Talking

Here are ten tips as you talk to your friends and get to know them better:

1. Be normal

We said this in chapter 2 but it's so important it's worth saying again – be normal! Let's be natural about our faith – it's an everyday part of us and we should talk about it in a natural and normal way. Remember it's about a relationship not religion. We're not talking about some

formula for salvation but a friend to introduce people to – Jesus.

2. *Build bridges*

As we talk to our friends we should look for ways to build bridges as we discover people's stories. Ask questions, listen, talk about things you're both interested in, find out about the other things that they're interested in, and talk more about them than about you.

3. *Do it your way*

We're all different. How we relate to our friends and help them find a relationship with God will be different to how you do it. We all need to feel free to find our own style – ways of reaching out that work for us. You will find that there are some ways of reaching your friends which you have more faith for than others. Concentrate on what you have faith for. God wants to reach out through you and in a way that is 'you shaped'.

4. *Make sure it's Good News*

We need to communicate the truth about Jesus in a way that is relevant and good news for the person we are talking to. Vince Esterman in his book *Sharing the Gospel* puts it well.

There is good news and news that is good ... If I share with an unsaved person, 'Jesus saved me and freed me from my past,' he may listen with respect, but he is likely to have the same attitude towards me as if I had said, 'I've just received a pay rise.' It's good news for me, but not for him. However, I would get a totally different response if

I said to him, 'Listen, I've just been speaking with your boss and he told me that he will be giving you a huge pay rise.' Now I would have his interest! This is not news that is good. It's good news! So, for our news to be good news for the person we are speaking to, our message must begin with him or her.

5. *Look out for dodging*

You're in the middle of a great conversation and your friend seems close to making that decision to ask Jesus into their life, when all of a sudden they say, "But what about suffering?" This may be a genuine question that is a stumbling block to them, or it may just be dodging. They know a decision is imminent, so they dodge it by throwing up a question to take you on a trail away from that decision point. We have to try to discern what's really going on at these times. The better we know our friend, the better we'll be able to discern a genuine question from a dodge and the better we'll also be able to be honest and say, "Come on, we've talked lots about that before, I think we need to talk more about getting serious about starting this friendship with God." We'll talk more about what to do at the point of salvation in chapter 5 including the necessity for repentance.

6. *Beware of your own 'pet subjects'*

Lots of people can have their own 'pet' subjects and we Christians are no exception. Let's give you an example – creation. We've met Christians who genuinely care about people but who are convinced that before a person can be saved, they must believe that the universe was created

in 6 literal days around 6000 years ago. But having a particular belief about creation is *not* critical to a person receiving salvation. We must be careful we don't erect barriers in the way of the person's journey towards salvation.

7. Learn to bite your tongue

None of us think completely rightly. We all have wrong thinking compared to God and we don't need to correct all the wrong thinking of our friends as we try to reach them. Sometimes we do need to help them by suggesting a different way of looking at things (if, for instance, we feel that a particular example of wrong thinking is going to get in the way of salvation). However, sometimes we just need to bite our tongues and say nothing. Instead, trust God. He's more than able to help our friend change the way they think, especially once they're a Christian. We don't need to be on some 'perfect thinking crusade'.

The same goes for some behaviour. Sure, there are things we need to help our friends see as destructive behaviour that is not God's best for them; but there are others that will change in time *after* salvation as God changes the heart. He's still doing that in all of us too; so we need to let him do it in his way (and in his order and time) with our friends, and not come with heavy pressure to immediately conform to our idea of perfect Christian behaviour. In fact the things the Holy Spirit challenges in a person immediately after they are saved can often surprise us – God's order of priorities is often different to ours! So we should be careful not to go ploughing in with our own agenda. People's lives can be complicated and messy but we should not be afraid of

this. We can trust God that he will have a way of bringing order out of any chaos and changing wrong thinking and behaviour.

8. *Invite*

We are offering people an invitation to be forgiven and start a friendship with God. Vince Esterman in his book *Sharing the Gospel* says that evangelists call whilst teachers teach: “The gospel is not an explanation but an invitation.” A person doesn’t need to know everything or understand everything in order to be saved. It’s also important to remember some questions can only really be answered once a person has started a friendship with Jesus. Their perspective will change once they start that relationship. They’ll learn to trust God and sometimes the questions they had before they were saved pale into insignificance afterwards. People can get stuck at the decision line if they think they need to have answers to all their questions *before* they cross over the line. Help them understand we’re all on a journey as we get to know God in a relationship and there are questions we all still have.

9. *Know your Story*

We all have our own story of how Jesus saved us. Maybe you were saved as a teenager or adult and can remember life before knowing God. Maybe you were a small child when you were saved but can tell a story more about how God has kept you rather than how he first met you. We all have a story; but sometimes we don’t tell it as well as we might. We need to practise telling our own story – writing it out can help. Get it to the place where it’s short

and to the point – it’s better to be short, leaving our friend asking for more details rather than long-winded. If we do have a short, punchy story at our fingertips, then it’s easy to expand it, depending on the interests and needs of the person we’re talking to. As you tell the story, think ‘Then, How, and Now’ – what life was like then (before you were saved), how you became a Christian (avoid Christian jargon), and the difference for you now. Think also about how it will connect with your friend and how it might begin to help them to see how God can meet some of their own needs. We need to understand that whilst the gospel is far bigger than a person having their needs met, God will often start by meeting some needs – it’s his kindness that leads people to repentance.

One other thing worth mentioning about your story: be aware in conversations about times when you can ‘throw some bait out’ that may lead to an opportunity to tell your story. For instance, Rich became a Christian when he was twenty years old. Before that he was an atheist, but now he’s a church pastor. He has been able to tell friends his story on many occasions by simply mentioning that he used to be an atheist. “What do you mean?” they say. “How come you’re now a pastor?” and the door for telling the story swings open!

On the subject of ‘bait’ it’s also worth mentioning that it’s not necessary to get under undue pressure to explain *all* the gospel all at once. It’s better to let a series of conversations open up, natural to the relationship, than to cram information down someone’s throat in a single, intense conversation that might do more harm than good. Learn when it might be right to throw out some

'bait' – in other words to say something you know will have impact but then to trust the Holy Spirit and leave it with the person. Pray hard and pick the subject up with the person again on another occasion.

10. *Remember it's about Jesus*

It's all about him! Paul sums up the gospel right at the start of Romans, "*Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God – the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son.*" God's gospel, his good news to humanity, is about Jesus. It's not some 'formula for salvation' but the truth about Jesus. Jesus himself is good news for people. So, talk about Jesus – what he's like, what it's like to have a friendship with him, what he's done for us all. We do more, though, than just talk about Jesus. In who we are, what we're like, how we live, and how we care, we represent Jesus. We're part of the message – not too much so that we take over and push Jesus to the sidelines but also not too little that the message we carry lacks reality and that authentic human ring. Finally, be like Jesus. When you feel compassion, do something. Take action and let it be a motivation to pray. Prayer fuelled with compassion is a powerful thing.

An Open Door

There is one final group of people we would like to mention: the friends and family members of our friends. As we reach out with God's love and kindness to people, we should not forget that they will almost always have other friends and family members and that God loves and wants to save these people too. This is especially true

when someone has recently become a Christian and the transformation brought about by Jesus is particularly evident. It's great to be praying and looking for opportunities to get to know their friends and family members. The newly-saved person is like an open door and God wants to walk through that door (through you) into the lives of other people about whom he cares passionately. In fact, you do not have to wait until a person is saved. We told the story of Jake Spicer earlier. His mum, Lesley, ran a group investigating Christianity with us and invited her friends and family to join us. She started it before she had become a Christian and went on a journey of discovery of hope with her family and friends alongside.

Questions:

1. Who are the people God is highlighting for you to get more involved in their lives? Don't forget the friends and family of those you know who have recently become Christians. Could you commit yourself to praying regularly for them?
2. Why not have a go at writing down your story? (Have a look at tip 9 in Tips for Talking.) Write your story down and then try to summarize it so that it just takes a couple of minutes to tell.
3. Try to think how you would answer someone if they asked you about why Jesus died on the cross. Avoid words and phrases that might be easily understood by Christians but not by those who have yet to start a relationship with God.

Chapter 5

Journey

Sooner or later when you talk to an evangelist, the word 'intentional' will crop up, because being intentional is so important. Most people are saved through a friendship with a Christian and by undertaking an intentional journey (even if they don't fully understand that journey when they first set out on it). Intentionality is what removes the seeming randomness from talking to people about God and is a reflection of God's heart to reach people. God wants to save people and plans for it. Jesus was and is intentional. His ministry had nothing accidental about it; he was intentional and deliberate about his Father's work (Luke 2:49). We see intentional, purposeful searching in the parables of the lost sheep and lost coin (Luke 15). Jesus intentionally invited himself to lunch with Zacchaeus (Luke 19).

Another example of Jesus' intentionality is found in John chapter 4, the fantastic story not just of a Samaritan woman, but of a village being saved. Jesus didn't have to go through Samaria as he travelled north to Galilee. In fact, Jews normally took a detour round to avoid it; but Jesus intentionally went through it. He knew there was someone to meet, and met her at a well. Jesus, in a wonderful example of inclusiveness, overcame the problems Jews would have had with this woman's race,

religion, gender, and sin, and asked for a drink. A conversation started, providing the opportunity for a word of knowledge, and he ended up staying in the village for two days. The story finishes with verse 42:

They said to the woman, 'We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Saviour of the world.'

Being intentional is about taking the initiative with our friends. Once we know their stories, it's about us praying and looking for God to show us what the next step should be. It's not without risk, but the risk is worth it. Let us explain. Do you remember Bill's story in chapter 2? He had seen God do amazing things for his wife, believed in God, had close family and friends who were Christians, had tasted God's goodness and love, but had yet to start a real friendship with God for himself. To see him move from this place to a point of salvation required us to be intentional: we invited him along to a DVD-based course we were hosting. Being intentional wasn't just that we took the initiative; it was also about *what* we invited him to. As far as Bill was concerned, we invited him to a DVD-based course lasting five weeks; but for us it was the next step of his journey towards salvation.

A helpful picture to understand this intentional journey that we help people to undertake is to think about stepping-stones across a river. Our friends are on one side of the river, or possibly part way over. There are a number of stepping-stones they have to step over to reach the other side (salvation). For us, we're praying,

talking with our friend and thinking, ‘What is the next stepping stone for them?’ At some point on the journey, it’s helpful to invite them to a group doing *Alpha* or *Journeys* or some other introduction to Christianity. This adds a new dynamic to the journey of discovery. Now they are journeying with other seekers as well. So, if one week a member of the group stalls or takes a bit of a step backwards in their journey, it’s very likely that others will move in the right direction and so there is a forward momentum towards salvation that becomes part of the group. They help each other to cross the river.

There are three parts to a journey – the start, the middle and the end.

The Start of the Journey

Start where people are at. Sounds obvious doesn’t it! Ask questions like: what are our friends like? What questions are they asking? What do they like to do? Where are they in their journey of discovery about Jesus? Increasingly in Europe people have little or no knowledge of Christianity. They may have had some spiritual experiences but, unless they are from an older generation or have been churchgoers in the past, they’ll know very little about Jesus. In fact there is a story of a teenager in England who was enthralled when he heard about Jesus but could not understand why God would call his son by a swear word! So you often can’t start this next step of their journey by only talking about Jesus (even if you know them well). Instead, you will often start by talking about the possibility of having a friendship with God or the spiritual side of life or about what hope really is.

If you start the journey where the person is at, then you avoid them having to make a big jump at the start. *Alpha* is excellent and huge numbers of people have become Christians through it. However, it starts with answering the question, 'Who is Jesus?' which may well be the right place to start for some (especially if they have some sort of church background), but it will be too big a leap for others. If you are looking for something that a group of enquirers can look at together, then you have to think where the material starts; what are the questions it is first addressing, and are my friends asking those sort of questions? There are an increasing number of very good short courses, many on DVD, that can be used.

Another question worth asking is to do with culture. What type of things would people in your group be used to doing? For some people listening to a live speaker give a 20 to 30 minutes presentation and then discussing it is perfectly normal and acceptable. For other people it's weird. They've not been in an environment like that since school, and it would be much more normal for them to watch something on the TV.

One final point. You may have lots of friends all at different stages in their journey of discovery about Jesus. Be sensitive spiritually and listen for clues in conversations (or nudges from the Holy Spirit as you pray) about whose life God is working in, who he is drawing to himself at any particular time. We will talk more about this in the next chapter; but remember we need to be working with God in what he is already doing. If you devote your time to people God has already touched, it will be much more fruitful and you will avoid

a lot of unnecessary arguments with friends who are just not ready to take the first step on a more intentional journey.

The Middle

The idea of looking at reaching people more as a process or journey rather than a single decision event (which can often seem confrontational) is very helpful and fits well with the increasingly postmodern mindset of Western culture. It is also far more natural in a friendship. But - and this is a *big* but - there is a danger. All too often the journeying theme in postmodernism is something of an aimless wandering without any sense of purpose or direction. Stuart Murray summarizes postmodernism well in his book *Post-Christendom* when he says:

Postmodernism enhances the process of desecularization: it endorses the resurgence of spirituality, reflects loss of confidence in rationalism and science and urges pursuit of authentic humanity. It regards all meta-narratives (overarching explanations and truth claims) as inherently oppressive. Uninterested in coherent systems or consistency, it is relativistic, playful, pessimistic and sceptical ... Some hail its liberating potential. Others find it too fragmentary, self-indulgent and incoherent to offer substantial foundation for society or human flourishing.

In short, postmodernism says “there is no big picture, no big story, no overall truth.” To put it bluntly, the danger in an increasingly postmodern culture is that the journey goes nowhere! We have lost count of the number of

conversations we have had with Christians who tell us that their friend is on their fourth *Alpha* Course or that they have had yet another conversation with a friend who seems to go round in circles. Let's be clear: there are no good conversations or good contacts in heaven; just good conversions.

The problem of meandering doesn't lie with our yet-to-be saved friends; it lies with us. We have to be clear that the journey is going somewhere – to a point where the person makes a personal commitment to Christ. Yes, the journey continues after that point, but that point of salvation is the focus and the aim. If it isn't, then your friend probably won't get there because there are enough distractions in the way for them to go off course. We have to maintain that crystal clear aim in our mind and our prayers. The devil will resist us reaching this point and, without us having a clear focus, will probably win.

How do you maintain such a clear aim? First, you have to be absolutely convinced of the need for your friend to be saved. We must not be swayed by postmodernism's rejection of the big story ('meta-narrative') and an overall truth. For sure, many of these have been used oppressively in the past; but one, the gospel of Jesus, is absolutely true. There are times when the desperate need for salvation faced by all people comes into sharp focus and perhaps no more sharply than at the point of death. Charles Spurgeon put it brilliantly in his sermon, *The Destroyer Destroyed* (see *Discovering the Power of Christ the Warrior* compiled by Lance Wubbels).

If I lie dying, Satan may come to me and say, 'You are to be annihilated, you are now sinking beneath the waves of time, and you shall lie in the caverns of nothingness forever. Your living spirit is to cease to exist forever.' I would reply to him, 'No, not so. I have no fear of your words, O Satan. Your power to tempt me here fails utterly and entirely. See there my saviour! He died – he died really and actually, for his heart was pierced; he was buried; he lay in his grave three days; but, O devil, he was not annihilated, for he rose again from the tomb on the third day, and in the glories of the resurrection he appeared unto many witnesses and gave infallible proofs that he was risen from the dead. And now, O Satan, I tell you that you cannot put an end to my existence, for you could not put an end to the existence of my Lord.'

We have had the sad experience of standing next to the coffins of some of our friends and the privilege of conducting some of their funerals. To know, as you stand there, that their eternal existence is secure because Satan could not put an end to the existence of their Lord makes all the difference in the world. You can stand there and whisper, 'See you later', and know it is true.

Second, you have to fight to keep believing that God will break in and that your friend will be saved. In the introduction we talked about the dream of people being saved, of lives being changed by Jesus, and of friends being baptized. We use these images in our minds as a spur to prayer. On any journey there will always be ups and downs. The downs can be hard. Our friends can sometimes seem further away from God than ever. But

keep fighting, keep praying, and don't give up. Luke 18 records Jesus' parable of a persistent widow who nags an unjust judge into action. He told the parable to show his disciples "*that they should always pray and never give up*" (NLT). This has become something of an on-going encouragement to us as we pray for breakthrough in the lives of our friends. Keep praying and never give up. The friend who led Rich to the Lord at university told him that he took Rich to an evangelistic mission event as a last-ditch attempt to see him saved. Royston had been witnessing to Rich for 18 months and it had been hard going! Rich didn't respond that Wednesday night and seemed as far away as ever. Thursday looked bleak too. Yet God was working in a way Royston could not have known about. On Thursday evening, without Royston knowing, Rich prayed and asked Jesus to become real to him. Jesus answered Rich's prayer and at 9.05am on Friday morning, sitting on his own in his college room, Rich became a Christian. He will always be immensely grateful that Royston never gave up.

The clear focus of a destination for the journey (salvation) and the determination to keep fighting will maintain momentum in the journey. It will stop you settling for less than your friend's eternal destiny being made secure and their experiencing the wonder of a transforming friendship with Jesus in this life. Evangelists can be helpful to us in this area. They will, by nature of their gifting, simply not settle for less than salvation. Evangelists have been an enormous help to us in this regard. They may make you feel uncomfortable when they give you the sharp dig in the ribs after you have settled for less, but their hearts are for the lost

being saved and nothing less. Be provoked and encouraged by them.

The End (and the Start of an Everlasting Friendship)

The difference between having a good conversation with a friend and actually seeing them saved can often be just one question. That point when you actually lead someone to the Lord is a real mixture of excitement and fear. Here are ten tips we have found to be helpful:

1. Be clear in your thinking

Know that there is a block to your friend starting a relationship with Jesus – their sin. Be clear that the cross of Christ is central for salvation. They need to repent from sin, confess their faith in Jesus, understand why he died for them, and acknowledge his lordship. Don't be tempted to fudge these things.

2. Follow the Holy Spirit

Very often, as you pray for a friend on their intentional journey, you will get a little nudge from the Holy Spirit saying it is their time to be saved. Let that nudge cause your faith to grow and be watching for that moment. Ask God to give you faith for this, especially if it's new to you (the more you do it, the more your faith will grow). If you find you lack faith for the final step, it's often helpful to fast for a breakthrough in this area.

3. Explain

Know how to give a simple explanation of why Jesus died and how he offers relationship and not religion. We have

some explanations we often use. One is from the Indiana Jones movie *The Last Crusade* where, near the end, Harrison Ford has to cross an abyss. The narrow stone bridge across is so well camouflaged against the far wall of the abyss that he can't see it. He has to close his eyes and take a step of faith in order to know that a bridge is really there. Starting a friendship with God is the same – you don't know for sure until you take that step and find that he is really there.

Another explanation we often use comes from our friend, Sean Doherty, and involves our local police station (the Cowley Road station). It's an analogy to help people begin to understand the enormity of the cross using an illustration from today's world. It goes like this: Imagine you're joy-riding a car on Blackbird Leys (our local area) and you abandon it, but the police arrest you and take you down to the Cowley Road station. There you are in the cell, when your best friend turns up at the front desk and says, 'It wasn't him that was joy-riding, it was me – you've nicked the wrong guy.' So your friend is put in the cell next to yours and takes the rap for your joy-riding. The policeman comes to your cell door, unlocks it, opens it and says, 'You are free to go.' All you have to do is accept the kindness of your friend and walk out of the open cell door.

Look out for good illustrations and analogies from popular culture that people can readily relate to. Remember to be normal and not religious in your explanations. Learn to communicate without jargon and be winsome.

4. Ask the extra question

Remember, the difference between having a good conversation with a friend and actually seeing them saved can often be just one question. It is the key question and we often bottle it. It's best to be straightforward about it as it is a friend you are talking to. "So let me ask you the million dollar question then; do you want this friendship with God we're talking about?" Another helpful way of asking the question is to help your friend realize there's nothing in the way of them starting that friendship. "Can I ask you, what would you say are the hurdles you have to get over before you're ready to start a friendship with God?" They may tell you a genuine hurdle that you can help them to get over; but very often they will think and then reply, "I don't think there are any." You can then simply ask if they would like to start that friendship right then and there.

5. A gentle push

Sometimes people get stuck at the decision line and we need to give them a gentle push, a little "Come on, we can do this together now." Vince Esterman in his excellent book *Miracle Conversions* puts it very well: "To gently push is to understand that the more one thinks things through, the more doubts and fears will take over and cause hesitation, even when the heart is willing."

6. Not quite ready

If your friend is not quite ready, then ask them if you could pray for them for God to draw close in the next week. Pray with them and put that time frame on it. You

can be certain of this: God wants to save your friend more than you want them saved and he will answer that prayer. Follow it up the next week.

7. “Yes”

When your friend says “Yes”, then explain you can pray together. Explain that praying is simply talking to God and explain what you are going to pray. The clearer you are at this point, the more secure your friend will feel. We normally pray a simple prayer one line at a time and our friend repeats it after us. The prayer we use varies slightly from person to person, but always includes thanking God for his love and the new life he offers, thanking Jesus for dying for us, declaring the truth of his resurrection and the new life he offers, saying sorry for the stuff we’ve done wrong, and then asking God to forgive us, come into our lives and be the new boss to help us live in a new way. We often will include a pause in the prayer for our friend to repent of specific things that are on their mind – they can whisper these or speak to God in their head, we do not need to know them. At that moment, when you pray with your friend, you will touch eternity. There is nothing like it! We always shake their hand or give them a hug afterwards. You will do this naturally because you’ll be so excited!

8. *The Holy Spirit*

After someone has made a commitment to Christ, we look to explain to them how the Holy Spirit (‘God here on earth’) can help us live this fantastic new life and enjoy this new friendship. We will then pray for them to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

9. Sometimes people want to pray on their own

That's fine – we write out a prayer for them and are then praying like mad for them over the next few days.

10. Follow up

Finally, once a person has made a commitment, we will be in contact within 48 hours. We will often pop round with a Bible (a translation they will be able to understand which uses their language – we often use the New Living Translation) and suggest they start reading Mark's Gospel. We also send daily text messages to the church to encourage prayer – sometimes a specific prayer request and other times more of a 'thought for the day' – and we ask the person if they want to start receiving this text too.

Questions:

1. Being intentional in reaching out is so important. It removes the sense of randomness from evangelism and plays a significant part in seeing people saved. How are you intentional and how could you become more intentional?
2. An intentional journey of discovering the truth about Jesus is a wonderful way of 'walking with your friends to salvation'. How could you be part of seeing such a journey beginning?
3. Which of the ten tips for leading someone to the Lord do you find the most challenging and why?

Chapter 6

Times

As you get to know lost people, become close friends, understand something of their story and taste God's compassion for them, you will find there are 'times' – times past, times to fight, times when God draws close, times of breakthrough, and times to ask.

Times Past

God often reaches a person through lots of people; maybe Christian teachers at school who prayed and cared, friends at college who sowed seeds, a work colleague whose way of living spoke out, or a neighbour who invited them to *Alpha*. We are not reaching out to our friends in a vacuum. God will have been reaching out long before we started and, as we get to know a person, we can learn what has happened and help our friend connect past experience with a present invitation to be part of God's family.

Let us tell you a story to illustrate this. Keith is a granddad whom we first got to know when he attended the baptism of one of his sons. His other son had become a Christian some years before, following the very premature birth of his baby daughter. The doctors had told him her life was in the balance, so he had prayed. On his own in a hospital room, he had heard a voice

promising him she would be OK. After her survival he attended an *Alpha Course* to find out more about the God who had saved his daughter. This son had then played a part in his brother being saved. Keith came to the baptism and first tasted a church that talked more about relationship than religion.

The following Sunday Keith was waiting in the car park when we arrived for the church meeting. “Would you mind if I joined your church?” he asked. We shook hands and walked in together. Two weeks later Rich visited Keith and Keith told his story. Over forty years previously he and his wife had suffered great sadness when their first baby son died at birth. They were devastated. But Keith believed in God, so he made a vow: he would pray every night for his children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, that they would not die at birth. More than thirty years later Keith’s son and granddaughter had seen God answer what had become a nightly prayer. Now, twelve years after that miraculous intervention, Rich simply had to ask Keith if he would like to know as a friend, the God he’d been praying to for all those years. The answer was a resounding yes. The story doesn’t end with Keith – a number of his family and friends have since been saved as well.

Not all past experiences are positive. Sadly, God can often be blamed for suffering and negative experiences, and this can harden someone’s heart to the point where it is very difficult for God’s love to penetrate. However, sometimes we need to simply be a friend rather than try to sort out our friend’s negative opinions by long

theological discussions. Love them, stick with them, and pray God will melt their heart.

A Practical Tip

Take time to get to know people and their stories. Let them talk and don't dive in too early. Their story will help you understand how you can begin to help them make a connection with God.

Times to Fight

Reaching lost people is hard work. Vince Esterman says that the harvest is not manna falling out of the sky but a crop rising from the earth. You need to work hard therefore. Part of working hard is learning to fight. There are times when we have to fight to see a breakthrough. Maybe someone seems stuck on their journey of faith, or we keep trying to reach out to a group of people but we seem to hit a brick wall. Alternatively, it may be us that need to see the breakthrough in our own battle for belief and expectation of salvation. There are few things as effective in this fight as prayer and fasting.

Fasting is not particularly popular with most of us; but it really works. We have found prayer and fasting to be *the* key means of seeing breakthrough. It is a powerful weapon in our armoury. To see breakthrough we need to fight hard at times, setting aside some days each week to fast from food and focus on praying for breakthrough. It's hungry work, but the taste of the fruit of salvation is worth it.

Another area where we have found prayer and fasting to be the key to breakthrough is when history seems to repeat itself in a negative way. Sadly, we have had a number of people who became Christians and then faced particularly difficult suffering and fell away. We recently went through such a situation with a close friend who was recently saved. To be honest, we had a nagging fear at the back of our minds: “Oh, no. Here we go again.” We were fasting and praying for change. The actual situation didn't change, but rather than falling away, we saw them continue to walk through suffering and grow in their faith to the point where they are now actively seeking to share it with others. This ‘accidental discovery’ of how prayer and fasting changes repeating history reminds us of a story in Mark 9:14-29. As Jesus comes down the mountain after the Transfiguration he finds his disciples unable to free a boy from an evil spirit. He rebukes them and asks the boy’s father how long he has been like that. “*Since he was very small*” [NLT] is the reply. We don’t know how old the boy is, but there is a clear sense from his father's reply that the terrible manifestations of this evil spirit had been going on for some time, repeating themselves over and over again. Jesus casts out the evil spirit and tells his disciples that this sort can only be cast out by prayer and, according to some manuscripts, by fasting.

A Practical Tip

Fasting is something we can train ourselves in! Start by missing a meal, then move on to fasting for a day, then longer – and don't forget to make time to pray!

Times of Drawing Close

“You know Rich, there are times in life when God draws close – don’t miss it.” It was 19th February 1987 and the guy who said that was an assistant missionary at the Christian Union mission in the college Rich was attending. He was right. There are times in life when God draws close. Those words were a spur in helping Rich to take the final steps on his own journey towards salvation. The following day, 20th February 1987, Rich became a Christian. When God draws close we should also draw close to our friends.

It’s important for us to walk with our friends on their spiritual journey. Be sensitive to what they and the Holy Spirit are saying along the way. Sometimes it will seem like our friend is moving in the right direction and at other times they’ll seem to be going in the opposite direction. Often, the Holy Spirit will give you a tip-off that God is drawing close and the time has come for them to be saved. When he does we need to be praying and be ready and waiting with the extra question we mentioned in the previous chapter. Try not to miss these times – people can be close to the decision line but then take a few steps back if we don’t ask.

A Practical Tip

Listening is a key – we need to listen to our friends and the Holy Spirit for clues for when God is drawing close.

Times of Supernatural Breakthrough

Many of us can probably relate to Rich's story of feeling God drawing close. Maybe we can remember praying before we became a Christian, asking God to intervene over some issue in our lives or wanting God to show himself. Perhaps we recall trying to work out answers to big questions or just needing comfort and help. There are many people who come across our path in exactly that situation. We don't always realize it, but the Holy Spirit knows who they are and what is close to their heart. This is why it's so important to follow the Holy Spirit. He gives us gifts to break open these situations for people, showing them that God sees them and cares about them and that he is real.

Prophetic words, words of knowledge, and healing are often very powerful when used with those who aren't Christians. God uses them to plough up ground in a person's life so they are ready to receive the seed of the gospel. A prophetic word can get a person's attention and provide the impetus for them to move forward in their journey to salvation. Similarly, a word of knowledge will cut straight to the heart if it shows someone that God does actually see a situation which the person delivering that word could not have known anything about. It proves God cares. Healing is something that goes hand in hand with the gospel, as we see in the life of Jesus. Praying for healing often has a way of dramatically softening a person's heart, especially if it is from a word of knowledge that shows God sees a person's pain and distress.

Gifts of the Spirit, then, allow the supernatural to break into someone's life. In Jesus we see the supreme example of how to live this out. In John 4 we read the story of the Samaritan woman at the well. Jesus' question about her husband leads to breakthrough not just for her but for the whole village. What is noticeable about this encounter is how naturally Jesus speaks to her. He communicates without the need for religious language or high drama. Very often if God shows us something in the course of talking with a non-Christian, we can simply slip it into conversation in a natural way. We don't need to be embarrassed nor make a big show of it. It is often helpful to simply explain that God loves to speak to people and show he cares and that he often does it through ordinary people like us. We should also bear in mind that 1 Corinthians 13 tells us that love is to be the foundation for all spiritual gifts and that even a very powerful and insightful prophecy should be thoughtfully and lovingly communicated. The type of language we choose to use is important and should not be blunt or forceful.

It can be very exciting when the gifts of the Holy Spirit are used in a church meeting where visitors are present. Someone may have come to church asking God to make himself known, and a word of knowledge could be the key to the jigsaw coming together for them. We had a moment like this recently while visiting another church. We had no way of knowing that a young woman in the congregation was visiting the church for only the second time. The previous week she had been brought along by a friend and had been enthralled by the idea that God could speak to her. The pastor had spoken on this very theme, so she decided to come again to see if

God would speak to her personally, and that's exactly what happened! She came up at the end in response to a word of knowledge about a diseased leg. It turned out that she had been very upset during that week because her much-loved granddad had been taken to hospital with a bad leg. We prayed for him and then the Holy Spirit gave a nudge to ask if she would like to know God as a friend. The fact that God knew about her granddad and cared about him had softened her heart to the gospel and she responded readily.

There is another side to this story, however, which is worth mentioning because it illustrates the reality of the fight we are in when it comes to reaching out. Very often we can dismiss a nudge or a word from God because the enemy distracts us with other concerns. It can be very subtle. That morning the temptation to feel negative and disengaged had been really strong, to the point where the word of knowledge had almost not been mentioned. It is worth bearing in mind that the enemy will use all manner of diversion tactics. Perhaps a practical thing may go wrong or an argument break out or someone may let you down. Often it is something personal, such as feeling inadequate. The key is to see beyond the immediate problem and push through. Pray together with those you are working with. Praying in tongues is also powerful in a situation like this.

A Practical Tip

Learn to recognise how God speaks to you so that you can use this prophetically for others. God 'speaks our language' in the sense that we are all created to think slightly

differently so God will talk to us in varied ways. Often God will use some kind of picture language. Maybe he will bring a Scripture to mind. It could be an overwhelming sense of something (such as an emotion like sorrow) or a memory of something in our own life that could be relevant to someone else. Some people may have a word or a sentence come to mind or it could even be that a dream or some other more dramatic way of God speaking turns out to be relevant to someone else. However God speaks, it is helpful to learn to communicate it in a straightforward and winsome way. For example, if a Scripture comes to mind, it isn't necessary to quote chapter and verse, but simply say that you are reminded of something the Bible says. It is also helpful to learn to discern what is from God and what is from our own thought process, which can sometimes be random and distracting.

Times to Ask

Words of knowledge which open a person's heart to receiving God, prophetic words, nudges from the Holy Spirit, and asking the extra question are all part of helping friends to be saved. We need to ask our friends the key questions and to be asking the Holy Spirit for help. We talked in the last chapter about the importance of asking the extra question. The more you do this, the more you'll be ready to ask, and the more people you will have the joy of leading to the Lord. But don't beat yourself up if in a conversation you miss the opportunity to ask that key question. Instead, look for an opportunity to go back to the question later in the conversation or even next time. Simply say, "You know, I've been thinking about our conversation the other day..." "

If our friend isn't quite ready to take the decisive step, then we can ask if we can pray. We can pray for God to draw close, become real, or for a specific need. God loves to give people a taste of his kindness before they are saved. One of our friends heard that a close family member had been taken seriously ill. Quite naturally, when we heard the news we went to see the friend and offered to pray. She was not a Christian and, to be honest, when we offered to pray it was genuinely because we wanted God to draw near and comfort her and to heal the relative. We were not thinking at that time of how we could see our friend saved. However, to our surprise, a few weeks later she became a Christian. She told us that when we had prayed she had felt a love envelop her that was beyond anything she had ever experienced. That, and the fact we had cared enough to visit her and offer to pray, had convinced her that God was real and she wanted to know him. It is often at times of great need or upheaval in a person's life that God draws close.

It's worth noting here that premature babies are hard work to look after. In other words, whilst we want to be clear about moving people towards the point of salvation and not be afraid to ask the extra question that will help them take that step, we need to balance this with not pushing too hard and too fast. Trust God and keep praying for the person if they're not quite ready.

A Practical Tip

Think about the ways it would be most natural for you to phrase the extra question. Maybe it's how we suggested in the last chapter – “So let me ask you the million dollar

question then, do you want this friendship with God we're talking about?" or "Can I ask you, what would you say are the hurdles you have to get over before you're ready to start a friendship with God?" Put it in your own words and be ready to ask when the time is right.

Questions:

1. As you read about the different 'times' are there friends you know who may fit one of these categories?
2. Which of the practical tips spoke to you the most and why?
3. Being directed by the Holy Spirit is critical in evangelism. Why not reread that section (Times of Supernatural Breakthrough) including the practical tips and begin praying for opportunities to grow in confidence in this area?

Chapter 7

Next

So what is next? We'd like to answer this question in two ways – what is next for our friends and what could be next for you.

Next for Friends

When a friend becomes a Christian, then the hard work really starts! The process of their nurture or consolidation is hard work and very important. Your friend has just started a friendship with God. God knows all about them, but they don't know much about God. So it's important to stay alongside at that time. Get together, or at least phone them, within 48 hours of their making the decision. If your friend is part of a group like an *Alpha Course*, then keep the group going after the course has finished. This is so important. People have become friends in that group and can learn what it is to be a Christian much better in that relational context. They are coming to those meetings partly because they want to meet their friends; so you seriously risk losing people if you disband a group. The battle for faith for consolidation can be every bit as intense as the battle to see someone saved; but don't be intimidated by this. Above all else, pray and pray and pray – pray for your

friend, pray for God to become increasingly real to them and pray for what they are praying for.

Jesus told a parable which is recorded in Matthew (13:3-23), Mark (4:3-20), and Luke (8:5-15), which we first discussed in chapter 3. Bill Hybels has described it as a parable Jesus told to keep evangelists sane. That is so true! It is the parable of the sower and is worth reading in all three gospels, both the parable and the explanation Jesus gave. We would like to suggest that the parable of the sower is only really understood in practice once you are leading people to Christ. Otherwise it is somewhat theoretical and people can have the religious misconception (and create pressure on new Christians and evangelists) that a newly saved person will be at the church meeting on Sunday and will behave as though they've been saved for twenty years. We need to read the parable, get real, and avoid religious pressure. Jesus told us (and the gospels show us this was his experience as well) that the human heart is fickle. Some people who hear the gospel will simply reject it; Satan will make sure of that (the seed falling on the path). Some people respond but there's no root; their faith just doesn't go deep enough and they fall away in times of testing. Still others respond but their faith is choked by the worries of life and a preoccupation with money. Some, however, make it (seed falling on good soil) but even they respond to varying degrees: 30-fold, 60-fold and the full-on, sold-out 100-fold. That all seems rather depressing doesn't it? Sadly, Jesus was right. This is what it is like, but there are two important ways to handle this:

1. *Expect '100-folders'*

Always assume that a newly saved person is going to be a '100-folder', good soil' disciple in how you love them and the time you give them, but don't create lots of pressure. Go at their speed and be sensitive to what the Holy Spirit is doing. This last point is especially important when it comes to God changing a person and their behaviour. Let God convict of sin rather than trying to do it for him, because he can change the heart.

2. *Be real*

Not everyone makes it. That's why, as Bill Hybels said, Jesus told this parable. We have to be robust as we reach out. It hurts when a friend falls away, because we care; but it happens despite all our hard work and prayer. We have to pick ourselves up and just keep going. If you are reaching out to your friends then you will also, sadly, need to be robust when it comes to the attitudes of some other Christians. We don't want to be judgmental, but we need to be honest here. There are Christians who are not very effective at sharing their faith, who don't lead people to Christ and who, frankly, have forgotten what it was like to first be a Christian. They assume that everyone who responds to Christ is going to be a '100-folder' otherwise, in their view, the evangelism and the evangelist are somehow defective. Our encouragement is to ignore their comments and not to be affected by their unbelief. People fell away during Jesus' ministry, so they will with ours as well. But let's also not forget the people who make it and shine bright,

bringing glory to Jesus. All our work is worth it for them and for the glory that it brings to God.

One other point is worth making here. It can be tricky to get newly-saved people into the habit of regularly coming along to a church meeting on Sunday and seeing the importance of being part of a bigger church family. We do need to recognize that in our contemporary Western culture where most people don't have a Christian background, Sundays are increasingly just another day of the week and not some special day of rest. For many, especially those who work shifts or are in the retail trade, Sunday can be an ordinary work day. In fact, it is estimated that a third of the UK working population now work on a Sunday. So, increasingly, church leaders may need to be thinking outside of the 'Sunday box' and looking at also encouraging gatherings at other times through the week. Having said that, Vince Esterman makes a very interesting point in *Sharing the Gospel*: "Experience has shown me that people who make a commitment outside the church context don't very often become committed members in a church". Of course, the church context is more than just a Sunday meeting, but his point is worth considering. Personally, we are now looking to run courses for those enquiring about Christianity in parallel with our church's Sunday meetings and in the same building. The enquirers and church mix together at the start and over refreshments at the end. It's early days, but we would say Vince has a point which is worth considering.

Gilgal

There is a story in the Old Testament that is very helpful in understanding the process of consolidation. You'll find it in Joshua chapter 5. The Israelites have entered the Promised Land after forty years of wilderness wandering. It's like a person today asking Jesus into their life – they enter God's Promised Land. But then the Israelites arrive at Gilgal and God tells them to renew their commitment to him. During the forty years of wandering no male babies had been circumcised and now was the time to re-establish the covenant. It involved pain and loss! Today, we see this time and time again with our newly saved friends. Sometime during the first six months or so as a Christian they reach their personal Gilgal. No matter how much you help them to count the cost of being a disciple before they become a Christian, they can't really properly count it until it actually costs them something. God will challenge them about behaviour, a lifestyle choice, or an attitude, and to accept the need to change will cost and will be painful. Quite often this is the point where issues to do with relationships (especially with non-Christians) occur. Money also features highly in the list of challenges. Some make the right decision and others, sadly, don't.

Gilgal can seem like a tug of war between God and the world. Like a child learning to be independent we have to be careful in how we handle it. Too much pressure from us can be really unhelpful, but the relationship we have with the person is key. Talk as friends, ask the Holy Spirit for opportunities to speak wise words, and fight for the person in prayer. It's also helpful right from the start not

to work alone if you can. Leading a group with others and introducing other trusted Christians to those friends who are on a journey can make the whole experience much less intense. When it comes to Gilgal it is especially helpful to have others fighting alongside you.

The story in Joshua goes on to say:

On the evening of the fourteenth day of the month, while camped at Gilgal on the plains of Jericho, the Israelites celebrated the Passover. The day after the Passover, that very day, they ate some of the produce of the land: unleavened bread and roasted grain.

We've seen this time and time again. When a new Christian faces Gilgal and makes the decision to go God's way, then they have a fresh joy and a real sense of celebration in their salvation. They also really start to taste the benefits and blessings of knowing God; they start to taste the produce of the Promised Land.

Next for You

It's a fantastic privilege to co-labour in the harvest. So here are five suggestions for some next steps you could take:

1. Nurture confidence in the gospel

We've already talked about the importance of overcoming unbelief. It's important to position ourselves for this to happen. The atmosphere in which we live is crucial for the nurturing of belief and victory over unbelief. Just as faith comes from hearing, so does unbelief. Therefore we should take care what we listen to. Do we absorb what the world around us says about

the gospel: that it's foolish (see 1 Corinthians 1:18), weak, or ineffectual, even something to be made fun of, or do we listen to God's truth? Watch out for anything (or anyone) that diminishes the gospel and be on your guard.

2. *Open your eyes*

Jesus says in Luke 10:2 that "*the harvest is plentiful.*" Lost people are all around us; we don't need to go far to find them. The thing is, we are often blind to this fact and need to open our eyes. Next time you are in the supermarket or at work or with your friends, ask God to open your eyes to see things in a different light. Ask him to show you the harvest, and keep on asking until you see it. If we ask God for opportunities to connect with lost people, they will come our way. Be tenacious in this. Read Acts and be inspired by how the early disciples took hold of the opportunities God showed them.

3. *Don't be afraid of feeling foolish or making mistakes*

It's easy to feel self-conscious and vulnerable as we reach out, but we shouldn't allow this to stop us.

4. *Persevere against opposition*

As soon as we get serious about reaching out, we will hit opposition. Sometimes it may feel like the enemy is trying to bombard us with situations that go wrong. At other times serious discouragement might set in, or maybe we face criticism. Whatever the tactics are, Satan is trying to persuade us that evangelism is not worth the hassle and that it's better to play safe and not bother with it. Don't be intimidated. We need to fix our eyes on Jesus at such times, stay constant, be confident in God,

and simply keep going. Be robust and cultivate a godly determination to press through.

5. *Give it a go!*

Remember you are commissioned by Jesus do this. It's all too easy, though, in the busyness of everyday life to have very good intentions that never materialize into action. Don't hesitate. Whatever God puts on your heart, do it without delay. We wish you lots of joy and success in this great commission.

And Finally

We'd like to finish with a quote found in the book *The Soul Winner*. Charles Spurgeon said this:

'He that winneth souls is wise', because he has selected a wise object. I think it was Michelangelo who once carved certain magnificent statues in snow. They are gone; the material readily compacted by the frost as readily melted in the heat. Far wiser was he when he fashioned the enduring marble, and produced works which will last all down the ages. But even marble itself is consumed and fretted by the tooth of time; and he is wise who selects for his raw material immortal souls, whose existence shall outlast the stars. If God shall bless us to the winning of souls, our work shall remain when the wood, and hay, and stubble of earth's art and science shall have gone to the dust from which they sprang. In heaven itself, the soul-winner, blessed of God, shall have memorials of his work preserved for ever in the galleries of the skies.

Memorials in the galleries of the skies that shall outlast the stars. Memorials that forever shine brighter than the stars as they glorify our Lord and Saviour. Surely, that's what it's all about!

Questions:

1. Have you had any experiences of nurturing new Christians? What did you feel worked well and what wasn't so helpful?
2. As you reflect on what we have said in this book, what is next for you in reaching out to your friends? Can you commit yourself to some clear actions with clear timescales?
3. As well as the actions from question 2, why not begin consistently praying for a few lost people you know and look to develop this into a habit?

Small Group Resources

Small group resources to help unpack this and other **2020vision**> **Books** can be found on our website:

www.saltlight.org/2020vision